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ABSTRACT

To fulfill the promise of standards-based education, vigilance is required to correct some of the missteps and deviations from the original vision of reform that fueled the move toward standards-based education. In this document, the National Education Association (NEA) provides concrete recommendations and strategies designed to remedy missteps in the implementation of standards-based education. The three most serious threats are determined to be inadequate accountability systems, incomplete alignment of the constituent elements of standards-based education, and unsatisfactory equity safeguards. Strategies are suggested to make midcourse corrections in each of these areas. NEA members have a big role to play in the midcourse corrections, and NEA affiliates have a major role as well. The NEA calls for a series of local, state, and national conversations to begin using the recommendations and strategies in this report as a starting point for corrections. An audit tool, published separately, has been prepared to evaluate the implementation of standards-based education and to use in conversations about standards-based education. (SLD)

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A National Call
for Midcourse
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ADVANCING STANDARDS

A National Call for Midcourse Corrections and Next Steps

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National Education Association

April 2001

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Lighting the Way

"People don't change because they see the light," according to a popular saying. "They change because they feel the heat."

So goes the argument that has been used in some policy circles to advance standards-based education up to now, insisting that public schools would improve only when teachers and students were held accountable for meeting high standards. Ironically, many of those advocates now are feeling the heat themselves. The push to hold all students to high academic standards has come under increasing fire as parents, educators, politicians, and others recently have raised important questions about the way in which standards-based education is being implemented — particularly with respect to tests used to promote and measure achievement against standards.

Yet, overall support for standards-based education remains strong. Teachers and schools across the country are using standards to improve student learning — a result of activities that began more than 15 years ago with the release of the landmark report *A Nation at Risk*. Certainly, the standards movement, as originally envisioned, still holds enormous promise for U.S. students and schools, and remains strongly supported by the National Education Association (NEA) and its members.

To fulfill that promise, however, all Americans must be vigilant about correcting some of the missteps and deviations from the original vision of reform that fueled the move to standards-based education. They threaten the success — and ultimately may even determine the survival — of standards-based education. All too often, standards have "raised the bar" for students, educators, and schools without the

accompanying resources and support needed to make standards-based education work.

A Call to Action

The NEA recognizes that now is the time for all of us — educators, parents, community members, policy-makers, business leaders — to pause, review the progress to date, work together to correct some of the oversights and excesses that threaten the future of standards-based education, and reclaim the original vision and intent of this movement.

NEA members hope all standards advocates can be persuaded to see the light *before* they feel the heat and acknowledge that schools need a high level of support to meet unprecedented expectations. In this document, the NEA provides concrete recommendations and strategies designed to remedy missteps in the implementation of standards-based education. The recommendations and strategies are far-reaching. They require considerable resources and the involvement of all stakeholders in American public education. But, let there be no mistake: The NEA and its members believe that standards-based education is worth the investment.



Standards-Based Education: Achievements to Date

There is no question of the importance of standards. The NEA has always advocated high expectations for all students. While this report will identify the most common shortcomings of standards-based education — and therefore the most needed midcourse corrections — the ultimate goal is to strengthen a reform approach that holds many potential benefits for students, teachers, and schools.

The NEA acknowledges that standards that clearly communicate what students should know and be able to do represent a strand of school reform that has had a powerful, comprehensive, and consistent impact on education in recent years. Consider the following major achievements:

- Standards have resulted in a broad commitment to clearly defined, rigorous goals for the academic achievement of all students.
- Standards-based education has prompted many schools to place new emphasis on effective teaching and testing practices that truly enhance student learning, as opposed to those that focus more narrowly on improving students' test-taking abilities.

- Because students need high-quality teachers to meet high expectations, standards-based education has helped draw considerable attention to issues of teacher recruitment, retention, and assignment, as well as teacher effectiveness, training, and support.
- Standards have helped make education the nation's number one priority by raising public awareness about education and serving as a focus of national, state, and local conversations about what really counts in teaching and learning.

These are not inconsequential achievements. They have helped move the debate from the question of *whether* American education needs more challenging standards to *how* to devise, implement, and meet them while remaining true to the original promise of standards-based education — that of “all children achieving high standards.” It is the “how” of things that requires further examination and mid-course corrections.



Recommended Midcourse Corrections

Regardless of who develops the academic standards, their implementation will be difficult. This is particularly so because the watchword for the standards-based reform movement of recent years is "high standards for all students." Those who have articulated this ideal indeed have set high standards for the movement itself. The effort to design and gain consensus around new, challenging academic standards — and to implement them in ways that include all students — commits reformers to a series of complicated policy problems and choices.

— National Academy of Education

Improving Education Through Standards-Based Reform, 1995, xi

Now is the time to review the "policy problems and choices" that have shaped standards-based education to date. Building on what has been learned from a large and growing body of research as well

as members' hands-on experience in America's schools, the NEA and its members have concluded that the three most serious threats to achieving the promise of standards-based education are:

- inadequate accountability systems;
- incomplete alignment of the constituent elements of standards-based education; and
- unsatisfactory equity safeguards.

Given these threats, the NEA offers the following recommendations, reviewing what has been learned in each of the three areas.

Inadequate Accountability Systems

The NEA recommends thoughtful reconsideration of both assessment and accountability systems, especially the role and function that high-stakes tests currently play in standards-based education. This recommendation is based on three disturbing realities:

- the extraordinary and sometimes unfair pressures placed on students and teachers;

- the amount of time and attention that testing takes away from teaching and learning; and,
- the potential for a widespread public backlash that could derail standards-based education entirely.

NEA members feel that tests and test results hold an important place in standards-based education, but only when tests are designed properly and used in conjunction with other indicators of student performance. No single test score should ever be used to determine important consequences for any student (e.g., placement or graduation). The most useful tests are those used to diagnose strengths and weaknesses of current teaching and learning in ways that inform future teaching and learning. Information from large-scale tests (e.g., districtwide testing programs or statewide tests) must be presented in ways that students, teachers, and parents can understand and learn from, not as "horse race" results that ignore the shortcomings and complexity inherent in such measurements.

Incomplete Alignment

The NEA recommends that states do a "reality check" on both the standards themselves and the systems needed to support them. If standards are found to be lacking, states must revise them. But more





importantly, states must examine and pursue alignment issues both deeply and broadly — examining the degree to which curriculum, instruction, and assessment work together to provide students with more rigorous learning experiences, and the degree to which assessment reflects, rather than determines, instruction.

The NEA also recommends that the concept of alignment be considered from two standpoints: the manner in which curriculum, instruction, and assessment interact; and the way in which state and local policies and resources affect the actual implementation of standards-based education.

The academic content standards originally conceived by national discipline groups were thought to be a first step in transforming education — a step that would require time and resources to develop and implement state-based and locally focused curricula and instruction in support of the new standards. The standards were conceived as a “living document” that would require revision over time.

The implementation of standards-based education thus far demonstrates that the rush to develop tests to measure student performance on the standards often overtook the development of curricula, instruction, and the preparation required for teachers to implement new and challenging ways of learning. The tests, therefore, wound up driving the development of curriculum and instruction — fueling, rather than reflecting, what goes on in America’s classrooms.

The degree to which state and local policies actually determine the implementation of standards-based education is a critical feature of alignment that has thus far received little attention. However, it is an important feature to tease out and examine. State and local policies (such as how, when, and to what degree professional development is offered or required; or, the type of teacher preparation and certification that is required) too often are constructed and implemented in isolation from the realities of standards-based education. But in the case of standards-based education, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and a lack of a “whole-system” view can



create perfectly functioning parts that fail to work well as a whole.

Unsatisfactory Equity Safeguards

The NEA recommends a thorough and ongoing examination of the effects of standards-based education on various student populations. The NEA also recommends that if schools or certain groups of students fail to perform to higher standards, a comprehensive review of policies and resources be undertaken to determine the degree to which student needs are being adequately assessed and met. For example, have students had access to the qualified teachers, specialized curriculum offerings, and educational technology and materials required to meet higher standards? This comprehensive review should take place prior to enforcing accountability penalties.

The NEA and its members are particularly troubled by the unintended consequences that inadequate accountability systems and lack of alignment visit on certain populations of students. These are often the most vulnerable students served by public education — those having disabilities, lacking English proficiency, or coming from high-poverty settings. It is precisely these children who often fall through the cracks who could benefit most from the raised expectations,



challenging content, and systemic accountability that standards-based education seems to promise. However, experience shows that it is not enough to say, "All children can learn to high standards," without the necessary safeguards to ensure that all students receive the academic support and resources that are required in this more challenging educational environment. What is needed are safeguards that protect children from the vagaries of inadequate accountability systems (including high-stakes testing) and policy and resource misalignment.

By asserting every child's right to a fair chance at meeting high expectations, standards raise an important civil rights question: If states hold *all* students accountable for meeting standards, are they not then obligated to provide *all* children with access to challenging curricula, high-quality instruction, and all the other resources needed to reach those goals? Because children come to the challenges of education from different starting places — with varying sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities — the focus must be on continuous improvement in student achievement across the board. Standards-based education, in short, must close existing achievement gaps.

The preceding recommendations are those that all stakeholders in the enterprise of standards-based edu-

the missteps of standards-based education, is the next step in advancing midcourse corrections.

Confronting Inadequate Accountability Systems

By stipulating rewards and penalties for schools based on student progress toward standards, accountability systems are meant to be "where the rubber hits the road" in school reform. But one almost can hear the tires squeal as policymakers — under fire from concerned parents and others — put the brakes on high-stakes testing programs and other accountability initiatives barely underway in public school systems across the country.

Parents, civil rights groups, and advocates for local control of education have worked to halt high-stakes tests in states such as Massachusetts, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Challenges already have forced school leaders to postpone implementation of graduation tests in Wisconsin, to lower standards in Massachusetts, and to scale back plans to end social promotion in Los Angeles.

These critics raise significant questions: Are students and teachers being given the time and resources they need to meet standards? Are new tests taking

valuable time and attention away from the teaching and learning of important subject matter? Are the pressures of constant assessment diminishing students' quality of and interest in learning? Are rewards, penalties, and other accountability measures being administered

fairly? Are record numbers of students likely to drop out of school as a result of being denied promotion or graduation? Are students, teachers, parents, and others receiving the information on performance they need to improve education?

It is becoming increasingly clear that many accountability systems intended to inspire improved performance are not working as planned — and, in some cases, are impeding education rather than improving it.

cation should embrace — recommendations that require swift and substantial action to ensure the success of standards in schools. Understanding each of these areas in depth, as well as the special role that NEA members and affiliates must play in correcting

The research is limited, but a handful of studies, anecdotal evidence, and several recent developments suggest that the answers to these questions are not acceptable. *Quality Counts 2001: A Better Balance* points out some of the major problems with standards-based accountability systems, including:

- nearly 7 in 10 teachers report that instruction stresses state tests "too much";
- nearly half of all teachers report spending "a great deal of time" preparing students in test-taking skills;
- only seven states require students to write essays or engage in performance tasks in subjects other than English;

- only two states use portfolios (compilations of students' classroom work);
- only nine states pay for assistance to help students pass high school graduation tests; and
- only two states subsidize remedial instruction for students who fail grade-level promotion tests.

The high-stakes tests at the heart of many accountability systems need serious examination and rethinking. Testing experts repeatedly have sounded alarms about the inappropriate uses of high-stakes tests that either do not measure the knowledge and skills described in standards or evaluate students' mastery of material they have never been taught.

Researchers Take Issue With High-Stakes Testing Practices

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) sent an open letter to state education leaders in January 2001, urging them to consider — or reconsider — high-stakes testing programs in light of AERA's recent policy statement on high-stakes testing.

"As the nation's premier organization devoted to educational research, we applaud the effort to improve schools," AERA said in the letter to the nation's governors, members of state legislatures, and chief state school officers. "But we have serious concerns about the ways in which tests are being used for such 'high-stakes' decisions."

AERA's *Public Policy Statement on High-Stakes Testing in PreK-12 Education*, adopted in July 2000, provides 12 criteria, based on solid research, that state education leaders, local school leaders, parents, and others can use to assess the assessments. AERA states that every high-stakes testing program should ensure:

- Protection against high-stakes decisions based on a single test
- Adequate resources and opportunity to learn
- Validation for each separate intended use
- Full disclosure of likely negative consequences of high-stakes testing programs
- Alignment between the test and the curriculum
- Validity of passing scores and achievement levels
- Opportunities for meaningful remediation for examinees who fail high-stakes tests
- Appropriate attention to language differences among examinees
- Appropriate attention to students with disabilities
- Careful adherence to explicit rules for determining which students are to be tested
- Sufficient reliability for each intended use
- Ongoing evaluation of intended and unintended effects of high-stakes testing

For more information, visit AERA's Web site at www.aera.net



Indeed, the American Educational Research Association, the nation's largest professional organization devoted to scientific research on education, recently took the unusual step of issuing a policy statement detailing 12 rigorous criteria that must be met for high-stakes assessments to be accurate, appropriate, and fair (see sidebar).

Although many states and school districts have crafted standards that cover a wide range of important knowledge and skills, the assessment systems meant to gauge students' progress toward those standards rarely have incorporated the multiple forms of assessment necessary. Public education systems are not using the full range of performance assessment, portfolios, technology-based testing, and other evaluation options necessary to measure whether students can demonstrate the abilities described in standards. These options include writing analyses, conducting science experiments, and solving and explaining complicated math problems, for instance. It is hardly a surprise, then, that Achieve, a national organization that evaluates state academic standards and assessment systems, has found that many states' tests do not adequately match their standards (*Quality Counts 2001*).

Likewise, it is becoming increasingly clear that many accountability systems intended to inspire improved performance are not working as planned — and, in some cases, are impeding education rather

than improving it. Texas, frequently offered by its champions as an example of accountability-driven success, illustrates the point. While Texas has shown some impressive results on both the state tests and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, serious questions have been raised on two fronts: whether the rising test scores represent real advances in learning and whether state testing programs are having a harmful effect on the quality of the overall education system. Texas is not alone, however. A study of Chicago elementary schools showed that the demand for high test scores actually had slowed down instruction, as teachers stopped introducing new material to review and practice for upcoming exams. In Washington state, fourth-grade teachers reported decreasing the amount of time given to nontested subjects (such as the arts, science, and social studies). And Connecticut's board of education became so concerned about the danger of overemphasizing test results that it issued a warning to limit the amount of time devoted to test preparation (*Quality Counts 2001*).

Critics point out that test preparation drives (and often overshadows) instruction, particularly in schools serving low-income minority students. In fact, some subjects not routinely tested are being jettisoned from the curriculum, and the types of tests being used sometimes result in "shallow" learning (e.g., facts and figures rather than more challenging content that may be more difficult to test).

Reaction to some of the problems that accompany sweeping change (such as those that accompany inadequate accountability systems) can be found along many fronts. While a general pattern of reform, resistance, and retreat illuminates the critical problems with introducing change, it also may suggest a more subtle weakness common to most reform initiatives — that, even when efforts hold value, leaders rarely forge the community connections needed to sustain and strengthen support as demands on students, families, and others increase. Standards-based education is a case study.

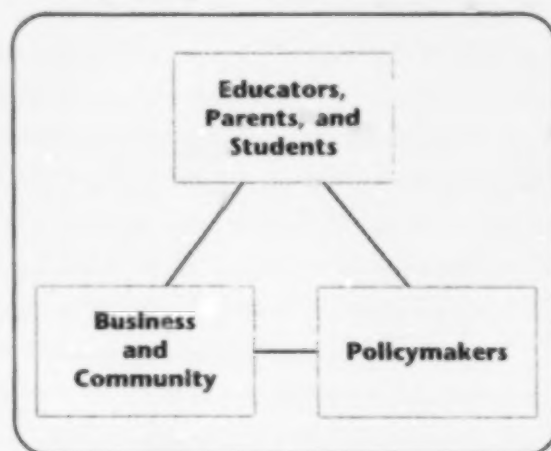


When Pennsylvania attempted to establish student "outcomes" but did not explain them adequately to community members, critics derailed the effort by casting the benchmarks as "antifamily" and complaining about state government meddling in local schools. When California crafted a performance assessment that won the approval of testing experts but was poorly explained to the wider community, the assessment succumbed to the objections of state citizens. And when the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System drew repeated criticisms from its inception in 1990, a failure to adequately respond to those criticisms moved state lawmakers to finally kill the test in 1998. Continued community engagement (and re-engagement) is a must as accountability systems are designed and implemented.

The experiences of public school systems across the country show that accountability systems frequently have fallen short of their ambitious aims, largely because they usually have revolved around little more than student test scores. But educational success depends on the efforts of more than just students alone. Teachers must do their job, and school administrators must provide capable leadership. Parents must support their children's academic success by helping them lead healthy, enriching lives. Policymakers and government officials must provide schools with the resources, services, and supports necessary to meet the ambitious aims of standards. And the business and community leaders who have backed standards-based education as a means of strengthening the labor force have a responsibility to partner meaningfully with public education systems by sharing resources and expertise. Clearly, what is missing (and needed) is a way to hold all stakeholders accountable for the success of standards-based education. As it stands now, however, accountability systems target schools, students, and teachers exclusively.

Accountability, in the end, means *public* accountability. Americans should expect that standards represent what all students should know and be able to do, that the tests used to measure student

Educational Accountability — The Big Picture



performance against standards are fair and effective, and that accountability efforts based on those tests are sustained by strong public education systems providing all students with the opportunity to succeed. To ensure such accountability, American public education has a long way to go.

Strategies for Making Midcourse Corrections in Accountability Systems

- States should review, revise, and refine high-stakes testing systems to conform to quality criteria established by assessment professionals. For example, assessment systems should incorporate multiple forms of assessment and provide students who have special learning requirements (e.g., disabilities, limited English proficiency) with the necessary accommodations, modifications, and exemptions. States should refrain from basing high-stakes decisions such as student tracking, promotion, and graduation on a single test score, but rather take into account other information, such as student grades and teacher recommendations.
- States should hold schools and students accountable when other parts of a comprehensive accountability system have been put in



place and when it can be demonstrated that resources and policies are in place to provide the support necessary for schools to reach their goals.

- Accountability systems should provide a balanced view of student performance, including information on school context, resources, and processes, as well as student performance in the classroom.
- Testing and accountability systems based on standards must be explained clearly, again and again, to teachers, students, parents, and the wider public to maintain support for strong standards-based education efforts.

course, schools must have strong standards as a foundation for alignment. State and local education systems have not always managed to lay even this basic foundation.

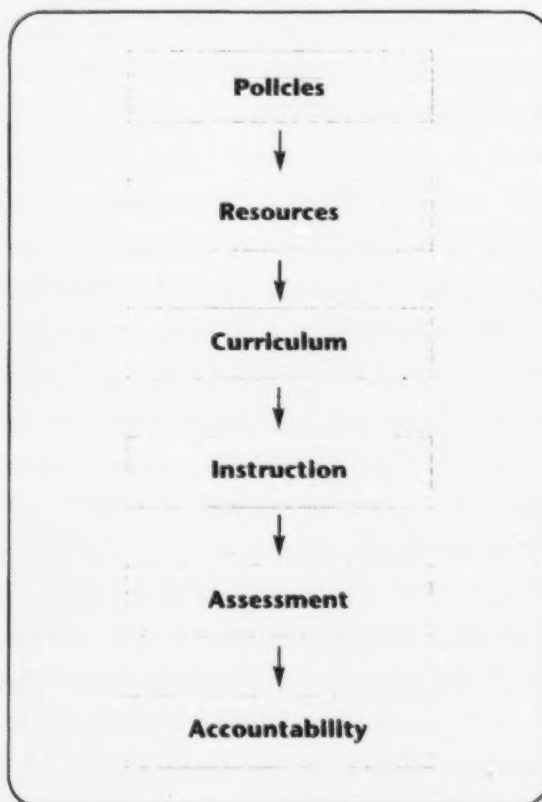
Standards-based education in the past decade has become highly politicized in a way that has fostered confusion about the aims of the reform. In the beginning, educators placed the emphasis on guidelines for high-level learning that could be used as means for improving achievement. Rallying around a common understanding of what constitutes essential learning, teachers, students, and schools were to have a new means of focusing energy and resources on effective strategies for meeting those goals. But over time, chiefly under the leadership of the nation's governors and top business executives,

Tackling Incomplete Alignment

It has been said that raising standards in education is like raising the bar on a high jump. It has been said also that raising the bar, in and of itself, does not guarantee that students will perform to a new higher level. This is where alignment comes in. Alignment is the process that connects curriculum, instruction, and appropriate assessments in such a way that all three reflect the standards. It is a process that ensures that learning activities focus on priority material; that teaching practices help all students reach learning goals; and that assessments illuminate ways to strengthen teaching and learning to meet standards. Similarly, alignment at a higher level — at the level of policy, resources, and implementation — ensures that state and local education systems are doing what it takes to meet the expectations Americans have set for themselves.

To help students meet these expectations, standards must be used as a tool to align curriculum, instruction, teacher training, assessment, accountability, and other necessary supports. But first, of

Standards-Based Alignment





standards-based education came to emphasize a more narrow "carrot and stick" approach: States were to set high standards, measure student progress toward them, and hold schools — as well as, directly or indirectly, the students and educators in them — accountable for the results.

This latter version of standards-based education — focusing almost exclusively on standards, assessment, and accountability — has dominated conversation and activity in education policy circles for the past several years. The differences between these two conceptions of standards-based education help illuminate the kinds of midcourse corrections that have become necessary and are most likely to provide the largest measure of improvement in getting standards-based education to function correctly. The NEA and its members contend that the central aim of standards-based education is to strengthen student learning, not to rigidly regulate education in ways that, too often, thin the curriculum, reduce teaching to test preparation, and diminish student interest in schoolwork.

To reaffirm the mission of standards-based education, educators must revisit the standards crafted during the past decade and examine them through the lens of a decade of experience. In some cases, the problem with current standards is quality — standards either lacking the specificity to provide real guidance about what is

The model national history standards released five years ago in three volumes, totaling more than 650 pages, for example, might take the better part of a lifetime for even a gifted student to master. Ph.D. candidates in history are not expected to have such a wide-ranging command of the discipline. It is hard to imagine how such overwhelming expectations could inspire improvements in K-12 education.

Studies verify the inadequacy of many state standards. For example, a 1999 study conducted by Achieve (Vranek 2000) analyzed the standards and tests of 20 states and the top-performing countries in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. The study identified an "international core" of 10 essential math concepts that students are expected to learn by the end of eighth grade in the highest-achieving nations and found virtually all the state standards included the core concepts. But these core concepts — the essential subject matter that standards are meant to identify for students and teachers — often are buried in long lists of other state curricular priorities.

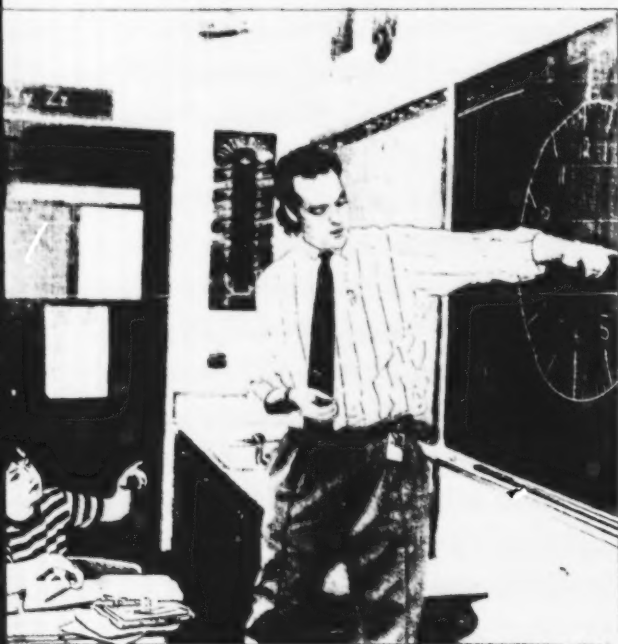
It should hardly be surprising that many states' assessments are aligned poorly with their standards, despite the assurances of state officials. Many states buy commercial, off-the-shelf, multiple-choice tests that cannot match every state's standards because

they are nationally developed and marketed. A 1999 study (American Federation of Teachers), confirms that most states — 28 — use commercially developed standardized tests. Only a dozen of these states even claim that these assessments are aligned with their standards. With standards and assessments like these, how are schools to

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important for children to learn or standards that are so specific they constrain teaching and learning. In other cases, the problem boils down to sheer quantity.

determine what is most important for children to learn and, more pointedly, how well children are learning what they are actually taught?



The lessons here are twofold: (1) assessments must be aligned with standards and (2) standards-based education must use a more fully developed concept of alignment. If curriculum is not redesigned to align with standards, it will focus classroom activity on the wrong subject matter. If instructional practice is not retooled to match the aims of standards, it will not help students learn in the ways that are most beneficial. If testing and accountability systems are not firmly based on standards, they undoubtedly will measure the wrong knowledge and skills, reach the wrong conclusions about student performance, and prescribe the wrong incentives and assistance for educational improvement. This type of alignment takes time — a significant amount of time — and deep, ongoing effort on the part of educators. Those who expect change to happen overnight underestimate the complexity of the task.

The NEA and its members contend that the public education system in most cases has not ensured alignment of standards with curriculum, teaching strategies, tests, accountability systems and supports for attaining standards. States must acknowledge that to

make the grade, the public investment must reach far beyond the current tight focus on — and loose organization of — standards, assessment, and accountability.

Strategies for Making Midcourse Corrections on Alignment Issues

- Stakeholders (including educators, parents, policymakers, businesses, and community members) must work together to resolve the existing confusion about the aims of the standards-based education by clarifying the mission: to improve student learning by helping all children achieve to high standards.
- Current standards should be reviewed and revised carefully to set appropriate levels of specificity, rigor, breadth, and depth — describing no more and no less than “what all students should know and be able to do” in a given subject at a given grade level.
- Research should be conducted to examine the way that high-stakes testing is affecting curricula, instruction, resource allocation, and accountability systems in standards-based education efforts.
- State and local school systems, working independently or in collaboration, must demonstrate alignment of standards with curriculum, teaching strategies, tests, accountability systems, and resources for attaining standards.
- State and local school systems must work to build and maintain public and parental understanding of what alignment means and how it relates to children’s achievement of high standards.





Addressing Unsatisfactory Equity Safeguards

Standards raise expectations, not only for students, but also for the entire public education system. By codifying the high academic expectations that all students must meet, standards-based education also implies new expectations for teachers, schools, policy-makers, and others. Standards cast in stark relief the civil rights imperative of providing all students with fair and equal opportunities to meet ambitious educational goals.

Providing such opportunities has *never* been easy — the advent of standards-based education notwithstanding. Despite the decline in U.S. child poverty during the past decade, nearly one in five children — 19 percent — still lives in poverty (Olson 2000). These, for the most part, are the children who currently struggle to do grade-level work in reading, math, and science. Because variables such as economic background mean that different children bring different advantages and disadvantages with them, schools must meet children where they are, give them the tools and experiences they need to make progress, and help them — *all* of them — achieve the same high standards. Today, schools are struggling to provide even more than they have in the past.

How are they struggling? Many teachers and students are working without the facilities and resources necessary for higher achievement; funding may not cover new equipment, training, and activities made necessary by standards, especially in high-poverty schools. Schools have not received the policy guidance they need on how best to meet the needs of children such as English language learners and special education students in standards-based education. Classroom curricula, instructional materials, and technology tools have not been aligned with standards in many places. Teachers rarely have the flexible schedules,



extra planning time, mentors, and professional development opportunities they need to adapt practice. Students in many schools do not have the tutoring, before- and after-school, and summer school programs they need to meet standards.

So what, exactly, does equity mean in a standards-based environment? What types of equity issues are likely to make a difference in helping all children achieve to high standards? Certainly, public school systems must close the gap between the "intended curriculum" outlined in standards and the "enacted curriculum" taught in classrooms. Recent research (Boser 2000) shows, for instance, that there is little in common between what some states' standards-based assessments test and what teachers in those states actually teach.

Likewise, professional development must be updated and upgraded to help teachers develop the new skills and knowledge needed to teach to



standards. For both novices and experienced teachers, professional development must address the academic content stipulated by standards as well as effective techniques for helping all students meet standards.

Moreover, state and local school systems must guarantee that teachers and students have the resources they need to meet standards. Without nuts-and-bolts tools, such as textbooks and instructional technology, aligned with standards, classroom activities almost inevitably will stray from the vision of teaching and learning that standards describe.

Arguably the most important issue yet to be addressed by standards-based education, however, is support for the teaching profession. The urgency of the issue is underscored by a growing body of research suggesting that nothing matters more for student success than the quality of the teaching force. Indeed, the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (1999) reports that "the strongest and most consistent predictor of a state's average student achievement level is the proportion of well-qualified teachers in the state." Controlling for student poverty and language background factors, the center finds that teacher qualifications account for 40 percent to 60 percent of the differences among states in average student achievement in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Yet states have barely started taking the steps necessary to guarantee quality in teaching. More than one in four high school teachers has no college major or minor in the subject he or she teaches. Poor and minority students often are taught by the least-qualified teachers. In 30 of the 35 states with available data (Education Trust 1998), students in low-income high schools were more likely than their peers in more affluent high schools to take classes taught by teachers without a college major in the discipline. In about two-thirds of states with available data, students attending high schools with mostly minority

enrollments were more likely than their counterparts in white high schools to take classes taught by teachers without a major in the subject (Education Trust 1998).

As a result of the escalating shortage of qualified job candidates, many states are lowering requirements or opening loopholes to staff classrooms with people who do not meet the states' own minimum standards for teaching in public schools. About one-fourth of newly hired teachers do not fully meet state licensing standards (Bradley 1999).

In addition, few public school systems offer teachers the professional development they need to teach to standards. Spending on staff development in most places is uneven and poorly supervised, targeting relatively few teachers, and doing little to ensure the quality of their experiences. Usually, such training consists of "one shot" workshops or conferences that are long on process but short on academic content. While almost all teachers participate in some professional development, most of them do not receive much. The National Staff Development Council recommends that 10 percent of district budgets be allocated for professional development and "25 percent of educators' work time ... be devoted to learning and collaboration with colleagues." Yet federal 1998 survey data show that teachers typically had only one to eight hours of professional development during the entire preceding year.

Standards cast in stark relief the civil rights imperative of providing all students with fair and equal opportunities to meet ambitious educational goals.

Teacher preparation, ongoing training, and quality assurance are especially serious concerns in an era when so many new teachers are entering the profession: U.S. schools are expected to hire more than 2 million teachers during the next decade — roughly 200,000 teachers a year. More than half will



probably be first-time teachers. This shortage arises partly from the growing student population and partly from the fact that one out of every five teachers leaves the profession within three years of entering the classroom.

How will these teachers be equipped to educate *all* children to high standards? How will policymakers, business partners, and others guarantee that educators have the tools, training, and support they need to close the historic achievement gaps among students of different races, genders, and social and economic backgrounds? Following are some suggestions.

Strategies for Making Midcourse Corrections to Safeguard Equity

- States and school districts must demonstrate improved efforts to attract, recruit, prepare, support, retain, license, mentor, and provide continuous professional development opportunities to high-quality teachers.
- State and local school systems governed by high academic standards must demonstrate that all students, especially poor and minority children who



face the greatest educational barriers, have access to highly qualified teachers.

- States and school districts must provide resources for schools to strengthen and maintain teachers' knowledge and skills through effective induction, mentoring, and professional development programs aligned with standards.
- State and local school systems must provide the standards-based curriculum materials, professional development opportunities, assessments, and accountability systems necessary for the "enacted curriculum" of classroom practice to mirror the "intended curriculum" described in standards.
- States and school districts cannot justifiably hold students, educators, or schools accountable for meeting high standards unless they also provide such necessary targeted resources as full and equitable funding, up-to-date textbooks and technology, and extra learning opportunities for struggling students.

Next Steps: Recommendations for NEA Member and Affiliate Action

NEA members and affiliates have a special role to play in ensuring that midcourse corrections are begun. They have a responsibility to offer their counsel and advice about how to remedy some of the problems mentioned in this document. Standing on the front lines of standards-based education, NEA members are particularly well positioned to offer guidance based on their experience with what is working and what needs fixing in their individual states and districts. Given their experience and the emerging research, now is the perfect time to engage educators as true partners — and committed stakeholders — in the difficult work ahead.

NEA affiliates are poised to play a special role as well. Given their reach and organization, affiliates can harness the power of the NEA's 2.6 million members. The NEA therefore calls for a series of local, state, and national conversations to begin using the recommendations and strategies listed in this document as a starting point for effecting necessary midcourse corrections. NEA members and affiliates are ready to work with other stakeholders and to provide leadership for the next phase of standards-based education.

The conversations are only a beginning. Improving standards-based education rests on gathering information about current implementation, an assessment of how implementation measures up against the attributes of an effective standards-based education system, and a well-grounded action plan to bring about changes and improvements. The NEA now has developed a device to do just that — a tool to systematically audit the implementation of standards-based education. This audit tool is based on 10 criteria or standards that NEA members have deemed critical to the implementation of standards-based education.





NEA Provides Criteria for Evaluating Standards-Based Education

How can we know whether standards-based education efforts are effective and worthwhile? The National Education Association recently provided an answer with the release of *A Tool for Auditing Standards-Based Education*.

The new audit tool provides 10 key "standards" for standards-based education — core criteria by which educators, parents, and other community members can evaluate state efforts to raise all students to high standards:

- Standard 1. All students are achieving at high levels.
- Standard 2. All students have access to the resources they need to attain high standards.
- Standard 3. All students are taught by teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach to high standards.
- Standard 4. Student standards are developed, implemented, and revised in ways that maximize their usefulness.
- Standard 5. Student standards inform curriculum and instruction.
- Standard 6. Students are treated fairly in assessment programs and accountability systems.
- Standard 7. Assessments that are used to make decisions affecting students, schools, or districts meet widely accepted technical and professional criteria.
- Standard 8. Assessment and accountability are used to improve teaching and learning.
- Standard 9. All stakeholders are accountable for making standards-based education work.
- Standard 10. The implementation and impact of standards-based education are tracked and reported.

The audit tool serves as a guide for discussion, data collection, and analysis that can be adapted to individual state settings and also may be useful in framing discussions at the local level.

Now available on the NEA Web site (www.nea.org), the audit tool can be downloaded for free.



In addition to the criteria, the audit tool provides examples of implementation indicators, key questions that stakeholders should ask about the implementation of standards-based education, and examples of supporting evidence that should be used to answer the key questions.

The audit tool does more than organize and structure discussions of standards-based education. It is, in effect, an organizing tool for mapping out state and local action in the policy arena, in professional development and curriculum, and in instruction and assessment. By systematically reviewing "what is" against "what ought to be," results from the audit can be used to develop a road map of precedents and priorities for midcourse corrections that are grounded in the original promise of standards-based education.

Time is short. Children are waiting. Let us begin.





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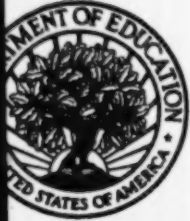
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